THE LEXIS OF QUANTITATIVE STRUCTURES IN THE WRITTEN PRESS: FIGURES OF SPEECH

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ABSTRACT

The semantic field of quantity can be approached both in terms of morphology and syntax. The present study aims to analyse the quantitative constructions in terms of figures of speech, *through examples taken from the written press. The diversity of meanings that the quantitative structures develop*, *explains a complex semantic field*, *the figures of speech having the role to make the discourse efficient and generate a series of semantic interpretations meant to refine the communicative act.*

Key words: *hyperbolic meaning*, *"linguistic fashion"*, *distributive/collective distinction*, *emphasis*, *synecdoche*

The complexity of the semantic field of quantity stems from its wide approach both in terms of morphology and syntax. The present study aims to analyse the quantitative constructions from the perspective of stylistic means expressed by the figures of speech. The changes that languages entail from one historical stage to another are characterized by a wide diversity, the idea being expressed by Ch. Bally "Languages change ceaselessly and can work only changing"[1].

The quantitative structures analysed from the perspective of the written press, have the role to generate new stylistic nuances, in order to achieve effective communication. The choice of the journalistic style is explained by its dynamics and responsiveness to linguistic innovation. The quantitative phrases have a well–defined role and generate a series of semantic meanings meant to refine the communicative act.

The words of the written press are not chosen at random, but they generate different meanings in order to better emphasize the journalist's intention. The idea is better expressed in J. Goebbels' words "we do not talk to say something, but to get an effect." The same word, used in different contexts develops a variety of semantic nuances, marking the positive or negative character of the information and sometimes the vagueness of the language.

The language of the written press grasps the frequent use of colloquial phrases and slang which develop an ironical tone of the message. Another obvious characteristic of actual communication is represented by the phenomenon called "linguistic language" which implies

[1] Ch. Bally, *Linguistique générale et linguistique française*, 1950: 18

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the exaggerated use of certain words or phrases that deviate from the appropriate nuance of the message communicated.

The semantic field of quantity that makes reference, for example, to the phenomenon of approximation or vagueness, comprises a series of phrases which emphasize both the lack of precise information and the author's irony towards certain situations. Phrases like *un soi de*, *un gen de*, *cât de cât*, *niscai*, *pesemne*, involve mostly negative meanings and vagueness of information.

The frequent use of figurative meanings of certain words or phrases with hyperbolic meaning is also intended to create a strong impact on the reader or listener. The massive presence of intensifying prefixes: *super-*, *supra-*, *mega-*, *hyper-*, *ultra-*, etc. penetrated through different borrowed words and subsequently used on the local field, is explained by their importance in the emotional sphere of the language.

The most frequent stylistic means that express quantity comprise the figures of speech (hyperbole, synecdoche, metonymy), with great efficiency in the discourse, their description being made in accordance with the utterance and the relation between transmitter/receiver as well as the knowledge that the receiver possesses.

The analysis of the figures of speech must take into account the objects of the discourse in the context, and this representation implies the comparison with a nominal group close to the designated referent. The figures of speech have a special importance and give the impression of exaggerating certain grammatical or lexical aspects in the sense of their transgression.

For example, syllepsis favours the "meeting" of two different meanings of a polysemantic word (proper and figurative) in the same occurrence: (1) *El vinde săptămânalele* ***Capital*** *şi* ***Magazin*** *şi anunță evenimentele cele mai importante.* In such a sentence *săptămânal* (weekly paper) designates both the concrete object and the abstract meaning that has in view the editorial activity.

At the level of distributive/collective distinction, the assemblies designated by the nominal groups in the plural or collective nouns can be understood from a distributive (reference to the members of the group) or collective (reference to the group itself) point of view. A construction like (2) *Asociația a fost înființată în 2005* (The association was set up in 2005) refers to *asociație* (association) as a whole, as compared to (3) *Asociația s-a întrunit joi* (The association gathered on Thursday) which designates the members of the association.

The distributive/collective distinction allows explaining the flexibility in using the definite nominal groups in the plural. In the sentence (4) *Întoarcerea soldaților a fost emoționantă* (The return of the soldiers was impressive), the noun *soldiers* (soldații) corresponds to all the soldiers from a distributive point of view, even though, in other contexts, in which it is

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interpreted collectively, the definite nominal groups in the plural allow designating the sub-assembly of a collection. The example, (5) *…francezii au votat… pentru un program de dreapta*, *fără concesii în domenii precum imigrația*, *securitatea şi fiscalitatea*. (*Revista 22*, anul XV, nr. 902, 22–28 June 2007) (...the French people voted... for the right wing, without concessions in domains like immigration, security and fiscal system), the group of *French people* is taken collectively, not distributively.

There are contexts which show the figurative use of the distributive/collective reference opposition, these references being expressed together and closely related in terms of syntax. This is shown in the sentence (6) *Ne putem imagina calvarul Kosovarilor… privind fețele nenumărate ale acestui popor în lacrimi* (Internet) (We can imagine the agony of the people in Kosovo… watching the numerous faces of this people in tears). *Numerous faces* share a distributive meaning and refer to the elements of the assembly expressed by the collective noun *people*. The whole (people) and the elements (faces) have a strong suggestive force, when dramatizing a situation.

Hyperbole

The collective interpretation of an assembly can designate only a subpart through a definite nominal group in the plural. The mentioned sub-assembly can be determined by the predication itself, as in (5) and in context; in this case, it comes from knowing the reality that the reader obtains. In the sentence (7) *Conferința de luna trecută le-a permis europenilor să ia decizii radicale față de Bulgaria* (The last week conference allowed the Europeans to make radical decisions as regards Bulgaria), *europenii* (the Europeans) stand for the subpart of Europe that handle the situation. Such contexts refer to the generalized hyperbolic use of the definite nominal groups in the plural, which leads to the idea that we are dealing with a process of writing adopted by journalists.

As far as hyperbolic description, is concerned it can be said that the limits of its perception cannot be based on an objective analysis. In an example like (8) *El merge mai repede ca vântul* (He goes quicker than the wind), the statement can be contradictory, insofar as the personal pronoun refers to a person, not in the case in which *el* (he) replaces an object, such as *aircraft*.

The importance of this figure of speech lies in the receiver's intuitive perception and his desire to exaggerate. Emphasis from plural references is a commonly used method, the figurative effect of creating an agreement between the transmitter and the receiver.

The collective nouns, more than the definite groups in the plural, stand for the privileged place of hyperbole, because the distinction distributive/collective is usually cancelled. The quantitative aspect of plurality and the abstract character of the collective entity act together to

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produce the appropriate figurative effect. In sequence (9) *Occidentul descoperă că nu este la adăpost de umbrele trecutului* (The West is not sheltered by the shadows of the past), hyperbole is given by the collective noun *The West*, the dramatic effect being enhanced by the metaphorical meaning of the phrase *the shadows of the past*.

In another construction (10) *Saddam… pe lângă indiferența aparentă față de avertismentul dat de întreaga lume…* (Saddam… besides the apparent indifference to the warning given by the whole world, *avertismentul* (the warning) refers specifically to the intervention in Iraq, and *the whole world* designates the allies in the conflict to whom the journalist gives an important role. All these examples are intended to produce both a hyperbolic figurative effect, and an emphatic dramatizing one.

Hyperbole can be seen in qualification and quantification, in expressing a feeling or a perception and is based on various grammatical classes: noun, verb, adjective, adverb etc. This diversity induces the idea that hyperbole must be understood beyond the language; it also shows the speaker's intention and its acknowledgment by the receiver, the only capable to better capture the specific character of the figure of speech.

These aspects stem from the various definitions that the authors gave to hyperbole: "figure of thought in the form of exaggerated expression (small or large) of an object/state/action qualities"[2]; "the exaggerated or amplified expression of an idea or a fact"[3]; "…l'hiperbole, figure qui opère une transposition du réel et joue ainsi sur la perception du récepteur, dans le but - non de le tromper, mais d'amener à la vérité même et de fixer, par ce qu-il dit d'incroyable, ce qu'il faut réellement croire"[4].

Synecdoche

Synecdoche and metonymy appear in a subordinate relationship with one another their common ground being the placement of the referents in close proximity to each other: namely the source and the target. All types of synecdoche take the object as reference in its quantitative and qualitative entirety. By synecdoche we understand the part/whole relationship. It is a relation part/whole (11) *Este un fundal alcătuit dintr-un amestec plăcut de voci* (Internet) (It is a background made up of a pleasant mixture of voices) and whole/part (12) *ONU începe războiul cu încălzirea globală* (*Adevărul*, 13.02.2008) (The USO begins the war with global warming); singular/plural relations (indicating the element by the assembly and the assembly by the element (13) *a avea părul des* (to have thick hair), (14) *a primi vizita corpului diplomatic* (to receive the visit of the diplomatic corps); gender/species and species/gender relation (15) *Toleranța femeilor face*

[2] *DSL*, 2005: 251
[3] P. Bacry, *Les figures de style*, 1992.
[4] P. Fontanier, *Les figures de discours*, 1977.

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obiectul studiilor specialiştilor (Women's tolerance makes the object of the specialists' studies), (16) *A câştiga pâinea cu sudoarea frunții* (To earn bread by the sweat of the brow) (Internet).

A sentence like (17) *Câştigă 5000 de lei pe lună* (He earns 5000 lei per month) (Internet) does not necessarily imply that he earns exactly this sum, since the social context does not require extreme precision, but gives an approximation for this type of information. If vagueness is frequent in the journalistic practice, using the conditional, collective nouns or metonymy as in (18) *Jurnalistul află la ora 3 că fostul şef va pune o întrebare guvernului* (The journalist finds out that his former chief will ask the Government a question at 3 pm (Internet), whose denotation is imprecise, the utterance (19) *Astăzi*, *aliații urmează să se întâlnească cu ministrul rus al apărării…* (*Financiarul*, 9.06.2000) (Today, the allies are meeting the Russian minister of defence) requires a separate analysis. *The allies* of the conflict in Kosovo acquire a meaning and an extension that the reader is left to know. He has the possibility to compare the title of the article with its content and make the difference. In other words, the figurative character shown in (19) is set up in context and content, though most often, the context is in close relationship with the reader's practice.

Synecdoche whole/part

Not all definite nominal groups in the plural are understood in terms of universal quantification. If the utterance in (4) corresponds to universal quantification (all the soldiers), in another situation of the type (20) *Românii au inventat caloriferul cu baterie* (The Romanians invented the radiator with battery) (*Adevărul*, 1.06.2006), *the Romanians* refer to one or more persons who contributed to this endeavor and this/these represent their country as in sport competitions. Kleiber (1994) mentions the existence of the "part" (referent) in relation to the "whole" designated by the nominal group, the latter being determined by the predicate and the situation described. This "part" makes a statement about "the whole" thus applying the principle of *integrated metonymy*: *Certaines caractéristiques de certaines parties peuvent caractériser le tout*[5].

Sentence (20) states something about "the whole" that is only empirically related to "the part", one or more individuals.

Nouns designating an assembly

Approximative global utterances described above are sometimes common, sometimes indispensable, demonstrating the plasticity of language. However, this general characterization should always be reported to the situation of utterance. In (17), the situation determines the relevance of the utterance. Referential adequacy is linked to the speaker's

[5] G. Kleiber, *Nominales*, 1994: 155.

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communicative intention as Apothéloz and Reichler-Béguelin stated: *le locuteur… peut*, *par des recatégorisations*, *par l'ajout ou le retranchement d'expansions*, *etc.*, *moduler l'expression référentielle en fonction des visées du moment*; *celles-ci peuvent être de nature argumentative* (*soutenir une certaine conclusion*), *sociale* (*ménager la face de l'autre*, *euphémiser le discours*), *poliphonique* (*évoquer un autre point de vue sur l'objet que celui de l'énonciateur*), *esthétique-connotative*, etc.[6].

The definite nominal groups in the plural, whether they are used figuratively or not, are characterized by great flexibility, which, from a certain point of view, allows them to unite with the expression. If an example of the type (21) *Nemții beau multă bere* (The Germans drink lots of beer) does not necessarily mean that all Germans drink beer, the utterance may be seen as a general characterization, which strengthens the globalized idea rendered by the definite nominal groups in the plural. If we introduce (21) in a situation where the "to drink beer" is marked axiologically, the global effect will have a different value.

Therefore, an individual belonging to the sub-assembly of those "who drink beer" or those "who do not drink beer", will obtain a new connotation within the framework. A definite nominal group in the plural may eventually provide a figurative meaning (assembly/sub-assembly) in accordance with the given communicative act or the discourse of the utterance.

Thus, there is an argumentative use of nominal groups designating assemblies. The argumentative discourse aims to present an existential reality and a global vision.

The use of constructions such as *the Albanian community in Romania* and *the Hebrew community in Romania*, requires the existence of such communities as units, delimited by the rest of the Romanian community. The effect of certainty, along with the global one combine, using the collective entity designated by *community*. The method of homogenized and globalized designation shows that definite nominal groups in the plural and collective nouns have a strong argumentative force.

Using figures of speech, far from being a free stylistic subtlety, falls into a specific manner of expressing a figurative meaning and a communicative framework which emphasize the interaction between transmitter and receiver. The importance of figures of speech in such a communicative framework is suggestively expressed by Amossy (2000): *l'importance de la réflexion sur les figures ne peut manquer de soulever des questions fécondes sur le rapport complexe qu'entretient le style avec l'argumentation. On peut se demander en effet dans quelle mesure le style contribue à l'impact de la parole*[7]*.*

[6] D. Apothéloz, M.J. Reichler-Béguelin, *Construction de la référence et stratégies de désignation*, 1995: 242.

[7] R. Amossy, *L'argumentation dans le discours. Discours politique*, *littérature d'idées*, *fiction*, 2000: 6.

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